DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 293 920 UD 025 710

AUTHOR McLaughlin, Milbrey W.; Shields, Patrick M.
TITLE Involving Parents in the Schools: Lessons for Policy.
PUB DATE Dec 86
NOTE 21p.; In: Designs for Compensatory Education: Conference Proceedings and Papers (Washington, D.C., June 17-18, 1986); see UD 025 691.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Compensatory Education; *Disadvantaged; Elementary Education; Federal Programs; *Home Instruction; Home Programs; Parent Influence; *Parent Participation; Parent School Relationship; *Parent Teacher Cooperation; Policy Formation; Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS Elementary Secondary Education Act Title I

ABSTRACT

Strategies to involve parents in the schooling of their children, especially parents of economically or educationally disadvantaged youngsters, are generally either advisory or collaborative. Advisory strategies structure parental involvement through councils at the school or district level. Collaborative strategies pursue various methods for enhancing home/school cooperation, with either school-based or home-based methods. This paper discusses these two strategies and their rationales. Studies of the involvement techniques indicate that school-based strategies have limited direct value for low income parents, whereas home-based strategies such as parent tutoring, seem to yield positive outcomes for all participants. In developing policy, the paper considers the following three broad questions about parent involvement: (1) Does it work? (2) Should it be a policy priority? And, (3) is it a feasible target for policy? The success of parent involvement efforts depend to a large extent on teachers' and administrators' believing that they will succeed. The paper concludes with guidelines for parent involvement policies. Recommended are policies which have an element of pressure, based on the incentives, values, and priorities that influence the behavior of teachers and administrators. A list of references is appended. (PS)

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INVOLVING PARENTS IN THE SCHOOLS: LESSONS FOR POLICY

by

Milbrey W. McLaughlin
Stanford University

Patrick M. Shields
Stanford University

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INVOLVING PARENTS IN THE SCHOOLS: LESSONS FOR POLICY

Deliberate, organized efforts to involve low-income parents or the parents of educationally disadvantaged children in public education are little more than twenty years old (Lareau 1986). Whereas the middle and upper classes long have had both implicit avenues for involvement--their ready and comfortable access to teachers and administrators--and explicit means of participation--Parent Teacher Associations, for example--less advantaged parents traditionally were unable or unwilling to utilize these modes of participation (see Schlossman, 1976).

All of this changed significantly in the mid-1960s as educators and policy makers converged on parental involvement as a promising way to improve educational outcomes for poor or underachieving students and developed multiple strategies to promote the participation of their parents.

The variety of parent involvement mechanisms and policies pursued in the past two decades differ substantively, strategically, and in their intended effects. These diverse experiences provide means to examine the operation of various modes of parent involvement and the extent to which they met their somewhat different objectives. This paper undertakes such a review as a way to inform current deliberation about policies to involve parents in the schools, especially parents of economically or educationally disadvantaged youngsters.

Modes of Parent Involvement

Strategies developed to involve target parent groups in the schools take two broad forms. One is largely advisory and structures parental involvement through advisory councils at the school or district level. The second is collaborative and casts parents as partners in their youngsters' education; this mode pursues various methods for enhancing home/school cooperation.

Advisory roles for parents generally have been tied to Federal parent involvement mandates. Congruent with the celebrated call for "maximum feasible participation of residents of the community served" in Title II of the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act (P.L. 88-452), Congress initiated parent participation requirements in education programs in 1964 with the passage of Head Start. This Federal education initiative was followed by the massive Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA; 1965), Follow Through (1967), the Bilingual Education Act (1968) and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975). All of these major Federal education

programs required that parents of community members play a role in program development and implementation at the local level.

Organized attempts to develop partnership roles for parents, in contrast, generally have been a product of university-based development efforts in compensatory education (see, e.g., Gordon, 1970; Gray, 1966; Karnes, 1969; Weikart, 1969) or the result of individual interests, policies and initiative at the local level (see, for example, Berger, 1983; Epstein, 1984). Two types of partnership roles have evolved. One is school-based and solicits parent participation as classroom aides or school volunteers. The other is home-based, engaging parents as tutors for their children. While these partnership efforts have been developed outside the policy arena, it has been the existence of a plethora of Federal and state categorical programs that has provided most districts with needed funds to carry them out.

Why Involve Parents?

What substantive or strategic rationale underlies these parent involvement approaches? Advisory and partnership models share common premises: That low-income parents have fewer resources to apply to their child's education (Lareau, 1986); that minority parents are less able or equipped to participate in mainstream activities (Deutsch, 1967; Becker & Epstein, 1982); that there are critical social-class differences in parent-school relations that disadvantage low-income parents (Ogbu, 1971; Connell, 1982); that educators see lower-class parents and their youngsters differently and less positively (Lightfoot, 1978; McPherson, 1972; Amato, 1980).

However, the strategic differences in advisory or participatory approaches also signal different diagnoses of the underlying issues. Parent advisory councils were mandated primarily to give increased political clout to low-income parents. Reformers such as Robert F. Kennedy believed that political poverty was as detrimental as economic poverty for the success of many Americans. Reformers argued that the economically disadvantaged needed additional voice or power as well as financial resources if educational programs responsive to their needs were to be developed (see also Davies, 1971). In this view, schools failed to serve the poor because their special needs and interests were not heard and attended to. Consequently, Congress included a community involvement requirement in the billion dollar Title I of the 1965 ESEA. The mandated involvement of parents, it was hoped, would make the institutions that served them more accountable. Further, Congress expected that mandated participation through advisory councils would also make federally supported compensatory education programs more effective because they would be based

on better information--information supplied by parents--about appropriate programs for low-income youngsters.

Partnership models draw their primary rationale from the research which points to the central role of the family in a child's academic career (e.g., Jencks et al., 1972; Coleman, 1966; Bloom, 1964; Marjoribanks, 1979) and the necessary inter-institutional interaction between school and family (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Leichter, 1974; Litwack & Meyer, 1974; Rich, 1985). This emphasis supports a different direction of influence and communication. Whereas advisory strategies focus on parents informing the schools, partnership initiatives emphasize the value of participation as a way for the schools to inform parents and build on the centrality of the home to educational outcomes (see, e.g., Rich, VanDien, & Mattox, 1979).

Involving parents as aides or volunteers in the classroom presents the opportunity to learn about classroom routines, teachers' expectations and school goals. This learning is expected to promote development of the mutual expectations, congruence of values and knowledge often lacking between low-income parents and educators (e.g., Comer, 1982; Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Strodbeck, 1958; Seeley, 1984) and to promote the sustained and meaningful support of parents for the schools (Gordon, 1979; Keesling & Melaragno, 1983; Rich & Jones, 1977).

Involving parents as home-based tutors extends this rationale of parent information or training to focus on the parent-child relationship and the importance of active parental interest in their child's education. Involving parents as tutors not only provides valuable practice and skill-building for youngsters but it also is a powerful signal about the importance of education and parent support for the schools.

Consequences of Parent Involvement

How effective have these various strategies been in meeting their objectives? Parent advisory councils receive mixed reviews. The general conclusion appears to be that parent councils have not been successful either in awarding more effective power to parents or in contributing to the design and implementation of more successful compensatory education programs (see e.g., the review prepared by Tangri & Moles, in press).

The comprehensive study of Title I carried out by the National Institute of Education (1978) found that parent council members regularly participated in needs assessment, planning, and evaluation in just one-half of local projects, in spite of Federal regulations requiring such involvement. In the most comprehensive study of parental involvement activities

under Title I, Melaragno, Lyons, and Sparks (1981) found that the majority of parent councils did not participate in any form of decision-making. While more recent survey research has demonstrated somewhat higher levels of participation in central programs decisions (Advanced Technology, Inc., 1983), case study analyses have shown that "participation" in many districts consists of little more than providing perfunctory input into detailed plans previously developed by administrators (Melaragno et al., 1981; McLaughlin, Shields, & Rezabek, 1985; Shields & McLaughlin, in press).

These general conclusions mask the great variability in parent council activities across districts, however. Studies of parent involvement in compensatory education programs have consistently found a broad range of participation patterns. While parent councils in many districts have existed primarily on paper or acted solely as rubber stamps for administrators' decisions, in a significant number of communities parents are actively involved in the planning and implementation of the program activities. In these districts, there is evidence that a number of reformers' expectations were realized. Melaragno et al. (1981) found positive effects on both program and students in districts where parents were actively involved in the decision-making process. In our own work, we have found districts in which parents have played a major role in decisions ranging from the choice of appropriate reading materials for minority students, to the targeting of services on particular grade levels, to the use of particular pedagogical techniques by teachers--decisions which parents, teachers, and administrators agree led to better compensatory education services (Shields & McLaughlin, in press).

While significant and positive influence on program practice appears to be a rare result of parental activities, important bureaucratic and political benefits are enjoyed by many districts which have established regular and systematic channels for parent involvement. Bureaucratic benefits are paid in terms of the ready mechanism provided by parent advisory councils to structure community conflict, to channel that conflict into a mechanism under the auspices of the school district (McLaughlin et al., 1985; Shields & McLaughlin, in press). In one New York district, for example, a compensatory education council was established before the Federal requirement was codified in order to deal with a group of minority parents who had physically taken over a school. To this day, the parent council is actively involved in many district decisions, including the development of a magnet school program to desegregate the district. The same pattern was repeated in a rural California community, where the district established a well funded council to provide an organized forum for the concerns of a group of protesting Hispanic parents.

In cases of intense conflict between the community and the schools, the incorporation of protesting groups into the normal decision-making process has added political benefits. Administrators in these districts report that community protest is lessened as parents come to understand the difficulties of developing and implementing effective programs. At the same time, such participation defuses potential future conflicts by ensuring that program decisions are designed to meet the needs of the community (Shields & McLaughlin, in press). Even in less conflictual districts, political benefits can be seen in the increased political support for the schools associated with an active parent council. In these districts, administrators have found organized parent groups to be powerful political allies. For example, one Missouri administrator, commenting on the continuation of the district's parent advisory structure even after Federal requirements had been eliminated, noted that the parent council had been "instrumental in selling our program to the general community" (McLaughlin et al., 1985, p. 151). Or, an Alabama district has successfully utilized its parent advisory council to lobby for compulsory state kindergarten and to circulate petitions against proposals calling for tuition tax credits for private schools.

Given the expected educational, bureaucratic, and political benefits of organized parent councils, why have studies consistently found many districts with little effective involvement? The nationwide study conducted by the National Institute of Education (1978) concurred with the analysis of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights under Law (Silverstein & Schember, 1977) that ambiguous Federal regulations were to blame for the broad variability in parent activities in local projects. Yet, studies carried out after the enactment of the very specific Title I amendments in 1978 found similar variability (Advanced Technology, Inc., 1983). The NIE study as well as the in-depth analysis of parent activities by the Systems Development Corporation (Melaragno et al., 1981) pointed to administrators' attitudes toward the value of parental involvement and the steps local districts have taken to facilitate such involvement as key determinants of parental activities.

Our most recent study confirms these findings (Shields & McLaughlin, in press). Compensatory education administrators who value parent involvement tend to run programs in which parents exert a high degree of influence over programmatic decisions. We also found negative relationships between the extent of parent involvement and administrators finding participation requirements burdensome and believing parents to be apathetic.

Similarly, districts with high levels of involvement had established numerous mechanisms to support parent involvement

activities--these districts were characterized by organized inservice training, by opportunities for conference attendance, and by the existence of district- and school-level administrators charged with facilitating parent involvement.

While parent and staff attitudes and district structures are clearly associated with variance in parental involvement activities, our in-depth case study analyses point to the community context as the overriding determinant of parental participation patterns (Shields & McLaughlin, in press). Due to economic and demographic factors, certain communities have attracted and supported specific minority groups. Characteristics of these groups, their size, stability, and the extent of their organization establish the specific context for parent activities in the schools. The type of staff hired to work in the schools, this staff's attitudes toward the value of community input, and the extent to which the district has worked to facilitate parent involvement are all related to the relationship between these groups and the schools.

In those districts where a sizeable and stable minority group has confronted the schools through protest activity, organized channels for involvement through the Title I and Chapter 1 programs has worked to the advantage of both the administration and the community. In districts where an unstable and unorganized minority group has never, or only occasionally confronted the schools, administration officials have found the parental advisory requirements to be burdensome and potentially threatening. Finally, in those districts in which community/school relations have remained cooperative (frequently ethnically homogeneous communities), the parental involvement activities have been perceived as a burdensome and wholly unnecessary compliance exercise.

Results from partnership approaches are mixed as well. Evidence is consistent that, whatever its benefits to middle and upper income parents, a school-based partnership model (classroom aides, volunteers, room mothers, etc.) is not always effective for low-income parents. Low-income parents are reluctant to become involved in school activities, don't see school-site involvement as especially appropriate, and further, have difficulty finding time for these daytime activities given the press of job and childrearing responsibilities. Some commentators note the ironic result of school-based partnership models from the perspective of low-income parents. These strategies actually can increase the disadvantaged status of low-income parents relative to their more advantaged peers (see Toomey, undated a). The inequality widens because participating middle-income parents often gain knowledge and mutuality of goals, as planners hoped, while non-participating lower-income parents do not.

Evidence on this point, however is inconsistent. While the Australian studies reported by Toomey found that middle-class parents benefitted, thereby increasing the differences between them and the lower-income parents, Epstein (1984) found that parent involvement at the school site did not affect significantly parents' (largely middle-class) responses to the school program or evaluation of teachers' qualities. Examining these data, Epstein (in press, p. 19) concludes: "(i)nvolvement of parents at school may help teachers or administrators fulfilling their teaching and other duties, but does not affect most parents attitudes and reactions to the school or teacher."

Involvement of parents as home-based tutors, in contrast, appears to provide multiple and direct benefits for low-income parents, youngsters and their teachers (Seeley, 1984; National Education Association, 1985; Tangri & Moles, in press). Parents who have taken on a tutoring role report that they understand more about the school--its programs, goals and expectations--that they feel more comfortable approaching their child's teacher, and that their parenting role has been enhanced. For example, Epstein (in press) finds clear and measurable effects of parent tutoring on parents' awareness and understanding about school.

There is strong evidence that these parental efforts pay off for students. Epstein (1984) reports consistent and enduring gains in students' reading scores as a result of parent tutoring activity. Earlier studies (e.g., Rich, 1976; Goodson & Hess, 1975) also underscore the value of involving parents in a tutorial mode as a way to raise the academic achievement of low-income youngsters. Further, Epstein (1983, p. 43) finds that active home-based strategies are successful in obviating the fall-off of parent involvement as children move up through the grades. Whereas parents of all social classes tend to reduce their school-based involvement as well as their involvement at home as their children move out of the primary grades, parent interest and participation can be sustained despite grade level through some home-based activities.

Benefits of home-based activities are evident at school, too. Teachers say that they gain valuable insights about their students and their home environment, especially when home visits are part of the tutoring effort. For example, one teacher commented that a single home visit early in the school year provided "six weeks of knowledge" about the child--knowledge that enabled her to be a more effective teacher (Epstein & Becker, 1982, p. 110).

Despite the apparent benefits associated with home-based parent involvement activities, the extent to which they occur depends upon the interest and the initiative of particular

teachers (Epstein & Becker, 1982). Where teachers take leadership and responsibility in establishing and supporting a parent partnership in the home, the positive results reported are seen. However, most teachers have limited interest in such activity, believing that low-income parents cannot or will not participate in their child's academic work or, further, that their participation (even if forthcoming) would not pay dividends for the student. For example, Epstein (1983, p. 1) found "...teachers who did not use parent involvement tended to believe that parents with less education could not or would not assist with learning activities at home." Epstein also found that teacher attitudes about the value of parent involvement could be influenced by increased exposure to parents with a low level of education. Her data show that increased parent involvement in the school is associated with an increased belief in and focus on parent involvement in the home.

Thus most teachers apparently conclude that investing effort in home-based partnerships is not worth their time. The chicken- and-egg problem associated with advisory councils emerges here too. That is, teachers who think low-income parents can play a meaningful role in their child's education take the initiative to support that role; those who don't, won't.

In summary, school-based parent involvement strategies appear to have limited direct value for low-income parents, whereas strategies such as parent tutoring, which move the site of interaction to the home, seem to yield positive outcomes for all participants, students, parents and teachers.

These findings thus belie the conventional wisdom that low-income parents are neither willing nor able to take an active, substantive role in their child's education. They also point to the importance of involvement strategies that reach out to low-income parents, instead of assuming parental initiative.

This is understandable when we consider that interaction between home and school, between parent and teacher, is a constructed reality which necessarily reflects the attitudes, beliefs and knowledge of each party. Low-income parents are less likely than are their middle-class counterparts to feel welcome at the school site, to feel that they have something of value to offer, or to feel that their voice in educational discussion is legitimate (Lareau, 1984). Because of these attitudes and beliefs, involvement strategies which require parents to take the initiative, or which locate the site of interaction at the school, predictably have been unsuccessful in involving low-income parents. They are involvement practices played almost entirely by the "rules" of the school or educators. Home-based strategies, in contrast, function

according to the rules of low-income parents--they focus on their child, they locate the interaction in the home, they build parents' skills and confidence as participants, they accommodate the demands on the time and energy of low-income parents (Toomey, undated b; Berger, 1983).

A Role for Policy?

Thinking about a role for policy requires response to at least three broad questions about parent involvement: Does it work? Should it be a policy priority? Is it a feasible target for policy?

Does it work? Evidence generated over the past twenty years' efforts to involve parents through diverse strategies generally is positive. Where parent involvement models have been implemented according to design, expected benefits typically are evident. (For an extensive review that extends the efforts cited here, see Henderson, 1981). Significant educational, bureaucratic and political benefits are associated with active parent advisory councils. Home-based parent partnership programs show clear student academic gains as well as increased levels of parental interest in and support for the schools. Teachers, too, benefit from home-based models through greater knowledge of their students' home environment. School-based models report different outcomes. While apparently successful for more advantaged parents, they have been less effective in securing the involvement of low-income parents.

These findings suggest that strategies which assume the initiative of teachers and administrators (rather than parents), which locate involvement activities on parent's turf (home tutoring, council structures and schedules defined by parents' needs), and which are responsive to local political realities (instead of state and Federal regulations) can be effective in securing the participation of parents of poor or low-achieving students.

Should parent involvement be a policy priority? Even if it "works", should parent involvement concern policy makers given the multiple, competing demands for policy attention? We believe the answer is "yes." Parent involvement merits significant policy attention and public resources primarily for two reasons. One stems from the strong evidence that low-income and poorly educated parents want to help and want to play a role in their child's education. Further, we see that this parent group seeks a role even when they believe their children will fail or do poorly (Scott-Jones, 1980 as cited in Epstein, 1983, p.23). Despite conventional wisdom to the contrary, lack of parental knowledge does not equal a lack of parental interest in the schools (see also Ogbu, 1974; Lareau, 1984). What are lacking, in most schools and districts, are

strategies or structures appropriate to the involvement of these parents.

A second reason for focusing policy attention on the issue of parent involvement derives from demographic data. The concerns and problems that prompted policy attention to low-income parents and the parents of low-achieving youngsters in the mid-60s will be magnified in the years ahead as changes in the differential birth rate between minority and majority populations, family patterns, immigration trends and in wage-structures increase this parent group many-fold. For example, today's school children have the following characteristics:

14% are illegitimate;
40% will be living with a single parent by their 18th birthday;
30% are latchkey children;
20% live in poverty;
15% speak another language;
15% have physical or mental handicaps;
10% have poorly educated parents. (Hodgkinson, 1986, p. 6)

A significant portion of <u>today's</u> school children, then, come from the family situations that gave rise to concern about new ways to involve parents twenty years ago. Indeed, only 7 percent of today's school-age youngsters come from families that were typical in 1965—two parent, single-wage earner families.

Further, demographic projections indicate that these trends will continue and generate a public school clientele which <u>dominately</u> is "non-mainstream" in the near future (Hodgkinson, 1986). Traditional, mainstream or PTA-type parent involvement models predictably will be ineffective in promoting the participation of the parents of these children. It is evident that the success of the schools in serving these student groups can be enhanced significantly by reaching out and engaging their parents. Experience suggests that school success is as much an act of social construction undertaken by families and schools as school failure has been shown to be (e.g., Sieber, 1982). There is, in short, a strong case for parent involvement as a policy priority. Parent involvement, then, apparently is an effective strategy when implemented according to design and is well justified as a target for public policy. But is it a <u>feasible</u> subject for policy intervention? Can policy make a difference in the level and quality of parent involvement, especially for parents of poor or underachieving students?

This question is problematic. It is not clear that policy can mandate the things that matter. As the preceding review shows, the involvement of low-income parents through any means has been extraordinarily uneven among the country's schools and districts. In general, mandated parent advisory councils have not been implemented as reformers intended. Instead, in most districts and at most school sites, parent councils have been effectively letterhead bodies that second decisions made by school administrators with little input or debate. Educators typically did not exert effective effort to form and support parent advisory councils; parent demand for active councils has not been high in most areas. Partnership models too have been implemented unevenly; where they are in place, they typically reflect individual administrator's or teacher's interest, rather than institutionalized or systematic concern.

Thus we must conclude that the development and support of effective parent involvement strategies turns on local realities and on the attitudes and beliefs of those individuals--district administrators and teachers--primarily responsible for implementation. Effective parent involvement activities, it is clear, do not depend centrally on policy guidelines. Indeed, it is evident that policy makers cannot require the things essential to meaningful parent involvement--belief in the ability of low-income parents to contribute in important ways to their youngsters' education and willingness to make an effort to involve them.

The Federal policy shift from the parent involvement mandates of the ESEA to the loose requirements of "consultation" with the community required by its successor, the 1981 Education Consolidation and Improvement Act, shows how superficial such mandated responses are in the absence of supportive local attitudes and beliefs. In the numerous rural, homogeneous communities in which compensatory education parents can only be differentiated from other parents by their children's test scores, councils disappeared almost entirely. Here in the absence of conflict between any one segment of the community and the schools, parent councils fit poorly with local norms of communication; councils structured by the 1978 Title I legislation had been both unnecessary and burdensome.

Similarly, councils have been eliminated in those rural communities where minority groups exist at the margins of political and economic life--migrant farm workers, for example. Here Federal requirements for meaningful parental involvement were necessarily insufficient to alter the unequal balance of power. Only in those districts--overwhelmingly urban--where parent councils have served an important political and bureaucratic function--channeling potentially harmful community conflict and generating support for the schools have councils continued with strength. In fact, in many of these cases, the

Federal mandates of the mid-60s built upon existing parent involvement structures and parent councils have co-existed for some time with other, district-generated channels of participation--evidence of the congruence of this strategy and local context. Consequently, even in these ostensibly "successful" instances it is difficult to attribute success directly to policy.

Is there a role for policy, then, in an arena that depends critically on individual attitudes and beliefs? The policy question must engage the chicken-and-egg problem associated with both broad forms of parent involvement. Administrators and teachers who act to support meaningful parent advisory roles or partnerships say that the effort is not an unreasonable burden and well worth the associated benefits. Administrators and teachers who for a variety of reasons do not support these modes of involvement for low-income parents feel that personal and institutional costs in this area outweigh any benefits. Yet we see that low-income parents as advisors and as educational partners (especially as home-based tutors) can generate important consequences.

To abandon a policy role, then, would render the involvement of low-income parents dependent on individual, local initiative and obviate the possibility of any systematic or institutionalized approach to the problem. Yet, to require involvement of any mode through policy would likely lead to much wasted time and resources where individuals and communities did not support the strategy.

Experience with general efforts to bring about planned change in education provides some purchase on this policy paradox. From this perspective, stimulating and effecting successful parent involvement efforts presents a change problem of the highest order. Developing and carrying out meaningful parent involvement efforts assumes the most difficult sort of change, change in beliefs and practices. While incremental change in existing activities, or change in the use or revision of existing materials present complex issues, the most problematic changes to effect are changes in what people do and in what they think (see Fullan, 1986). Implementing effective parent involvement activities requires both. Teachers and administrators need to change their beliefs and attitudes about low-income or poorly educated parents before they can develop practices to work meaningfully with them.

This analysis presents a discouraging conundrum. However, there is evidence that policy can be successful in modifying beliefs. In particular, the planned change literature indicates that behavior often changes before beliefs (see Fullan, 1982). While believing is doing, then, it also appears that, in some instances, doing is believing.

This suggests a policy approach to parent involvement that strategically combines pressure and support. Some combination of these is necessary to encourage teachers and administrators to try various parent involvement activities with the goal of eventually modifying their attitudes about the ability and interest of low-income parents. But some combination of pressure and support is necessary, too, even for those individuals who support these goals. The policy questions thus become "what kinds of pressures?" "what kinds of support?" are appropriate to promote parental involvement for low-income, low-achieving youngsters.

Guidelines for Parent Involvement Policies

Evidence from the past 15 years' efforts to carry out planned change shows that little change or improvement occurs without some element of pressure--even where participation is voluntary (Fullan, 1986). Pressure in this instance serves as an attention-focusing strategy, establishing priority for an activity or change in the context of many other, and often competing, demands. At the same time, experience has shown that the search for appropriate pressures should move beyond the rule-based pressures that characterized parent involvement policies in the past. The inability of mandates to bring about parent involvement to any meaningful extent is evident. A more fruitful source of policy pressure to encourage parent involvement may be norm-based--pressures based in the incentives, values and priorities that influence the behavior of teachers and administrators.

Normative pressure would comprise information about the success of various parent involvement activities, incentives to try new practices or peer-based development efforts, expectations for professional behavior at the school and district level. Central to such a norm-based approach would be education. Education for teachers about the merits of involving parents, about the interest and willingness of low-income or poorly educated parents to become involved, about specific involvement models that have proven successful. Education for administrators about the importance of teachers' initiative and of administrators' expectations concerning parent involvement in the school or district, about the bureaucratic and political value of parent councils, about the importance of signaling the value of parent involvement to both teachers and community. Education for public opinion leaders about the particular promise and contribution of involvement for the parents of poor or educationally disadvantaged children.

These education-oriented efforts aim directly at the professional norms and values that drive practitioner choices. Of the multiple pressures operant in the education policy system--the various sanctions and incentives--those based in

the normative structure of the profession consistently have been most effective in changing educators' behavior (see, e.g., Lortie, 1975; Fullan, 1982). Credible, specific information about the value of parent involvement activities, clear expectations from opinion leaders and organizational leaders about the need for and merit of parent involvement, detailed and believable descriptions of successful activities are more likely than are rules or mandates to move educators to try something new in the area of parent involvement--even if they are not yet convinced of its value.

There is, in short, a substantial "sell job" to do in the education policy system concerning the participation of low-income, poorly educated parents. This, together with the attendant requirements for change in attitudes and beliefs, presents a difficult but not impossible challenge for policy.

What kinds of supports could policy provide? If normative pressures succeed in nudging educators to consider new practices, these inclinations require support such as materials, training, networks, mini-grants, and the like. Of particular importance are the dissemination of information on and financial and logistical support for successful parent involvement strategies. Even those educators convinced of the value of parental involvement are often strapped for creative and effective mechanisms to foster meaningful participation. This need is most acute in rural areas where myriad cultural, educational, and logistical obstacles often undermine the plans of committed teachers and administrators.

We also would include "rules" under the rubric of support (rather than pressure). The history of Federal compensatory efforts clearly shows the importance of rules as legitimation for new activities or efforts likely to encounter serious opposition. "Because I have to" has protected many a Title I administrator from pressures to distribute resources or develop structures other than as intended by the legislation. Some kind of sanction through policy can support local efforts and highlight the area in the midst of other competing initiatives and pressures. The School Improvement Program in California, for example, has experienced success in fostering effective parent involvement by requiring school-site "partnership" councils (50 percent staff, 50 percent community members), charged with specific programmatic responsibilities: planning, needs assessment, and evaluation. Parents and administrators agree that this council model has been effective because it is <u>not</u> dominated by parents and because it provides for decision-making authority. While such specific requirements might prove unenforceable and politically unfeasible in Federal categorical programs, we would argue for the continued inclusion of mandates for consultation with parents in such legislation.

But to reiterate, rules or mandates alone cannot stimulate the changes in beliefs, attitudes and practices necessary to a meaningful level of parent involvement in the schools. Change of the nature and level required depends on motivating teachers and administrators to try. The evidence is compelling that doing can be believing.

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